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SUBJECT: BURMA IN THE LAO NEWS, BUT NOT EXACTLY WHAT WE WANT TO SEE

1. (U) Summary. Laos's government-controlled television, radio, and print press covered Burma extensively in the last few days, but not in the manner that we would like to see. Burmese Foreign Minister U Nyan Win was in Vientiane for an official visit, participating in the 8th meeting of the two countries' bilateral commission in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. State media covered the Foreign Minister's courtesy calls, the commissions' meetings, and the importance of strengthening bilateral cooperation. End summary.

¶2. (U) Burmese Foreign Minister Win's October 29-November 2 visit to Laos garnered front page coverage in the papers, as well as leading television and radio broadcasts. This was part of an annual exchange of visits related to the Lao-Myanmar, Myanmar-Laos Cooperation Commission, which is headed by the Foreign Ministers of the two countries. Win's courtesy call on Lao President Choummaly Sayasone was the lead story in the English language paper Vientiane Times and Lao language papers Pathet Lao, Paxason, and Vientiane Mai. KPL, the other English language paper - usually a day behind the others - covered the same story on November 2.

¶3. (U) Drawing from the Lao National News Agency's feed, the media said the Lao President welcomed Mr. Win, conveyed his greetings to Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council Senior General Than Schwe, and "expressed his sadness" at the death of late Prime Minister of Burma General Soe Win. In addition, "Mr. Choummaly praised Mr. Win for the achievements of the meeting between the two commissions and said he highly valued the previous relations and cooperation of both countries which had been strengthened through the exchange of visits between high-ranking delegations."

¶4. (U) Coverage of the visit and the importance of strengthening bilateral ties continued on November 2 with the placement of more Lao National News Agency stories on discussions of Lao-Burmese cooperation. The November 2 articles proclaimed the friendship and mutual understanding of the two nations and said that the commissions had confirmed their intention to pursue further cooperation and to establish sister city relationships. Luang Prabang, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is expected to pair up with the Burmese city of Bagan. The two nations say they will continue their joint efforts in areas such as border control, religion, agriculture, and "between the ministries of foreign affairs of both countries, in ASEAN and international arenas."

¶5. (U) Post notes that the articles do not appear with individual bylines in any of the papers, and the articles are clearly sourced to the Lao National News Agency. There is very little deviation in the wording, and Lao National Television read from the same text.

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